Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
I Believe in the Communion of Saints

Text: Philippians 2:1-4 -- So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Introduction: For the last few months we've been working through a series called ***Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed*.** This is the oldest and most widely accepted creed, recognized by **Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians** alike. Last week we looked at the line that says, **"I believe in the Holy Christian Church."** We distinguished between ***the universal church*** ... made up of the whole company of God's redeemed from Pentecost until the end of the rapture ... ***and the local church*** ... made up of a group of Christ-followers who meet at a specific location at a specific time to **"do life together while working to fulfill the Great Commission."** This morning, I want us to consider the next line of the creed: **"I believe in the communion of saints." We normally receive communion (the fellowship we share together in the body and blood of Christ) on 1st Sunday of the month. It reminds us of the special bond that unites every believer for all time as we look to Jesus our Savior on the cross ... at least it's supposed to.** I read a story a while ago about two men who sat beside each other on a plane. They struck up a conversation that eventually led to spiritual things. One asked the other, "**Are you a Christian**?" "**Yes, as a matter of fact, I am**." "**Wonderful**!" said the first man. After more conversation, he asked, "**Are you Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox**?" "**I'm a Protestant**." "**That's terrific. So am I**." The questions continued, "**Are you Calvinist or Arminian in your theology**?" "**I'm happy to say that I'm a staunch Calvinist**." "**That's fantastic. So am I! If you don't mind my asking, are you a Calvinistic Baptist or a Calvinistic Presbyterian**?" "**I'm a Calvinistic Baptist**." "**What a coincidence. I'm a Calvinistic Baptist too! Are you a Northern Calvinistic Baptist or a Southern Calvinistic Baptist**?" "**By heritage and by choice I am proud to be a Northern Calvinistic Baptist**." "**Unbelievable!**" replied the first man. "**So am I. May I ask if you are a Northern Regular Calvinistic Baptist or a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist**?" "**I'm a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist**." "**This is truly astounding. There are only 200 of us in the world--and two of us just happen to meet on a plane. Tell me, sir, would you happen to be a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist Convention of 1844 or a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist Convention of 1868**?" "**I am a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist Convention of 1844**." "**Now this is truly a miracle**!" the first man declared. He had only one last question. "**Are you a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist Convention of 1844 King James Version or a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist Convention of 1844 New International Version**?" "**I am a Northern Conservative Calvinistic Baptist of 1844 New International Version**," came the quick reply. And that's when the first man stopped smiling, turned away and said, "**Die, heretic. Die**!" We laugh (or frown) at this story because we know it can hit a little close to

home. **Sadly, we recognize that Christians are often known more for what separates us than what unites us**. ***But it shouldn't be this way***. So, in an effort to recommit ourselves to the high priority of the communion of saints join me as we attempt to gain a better understanding of WHAT IT IS, WHERE IT COMES FROM, HOW IT'S PRODUCED AND WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE when we display it together.

What is communion? In my study for this message, I discovered that the phrase "**the communion of saints**" was a late addition to the Apostles' Creed, added several centuries after the words "**the holy Catholic (Christian) church**." **The question we have to ask ourselves is why some of the church fathers felt it was necessary to add it, especially when the two statements seem to be so similar in meaning**. Last week, we noted that the word "**communion**" is taken from the Greek word "**koinonia**" and is often translated as fellowship or partnership. This is how Paul uses the word in **Philippians 1:5 -- "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now**." The idea is to share something together in a close relationship ... in this case the gospel message. The word "**saints**" is "**hagios**," meaning "**holy ones**." It isn't a word that is meant to be applied only to super Christians like Billy Graham or the great missionary Hudson Taylor, but to all true believers (**Philippians 1:1 -- to all the saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi**). **So, the phrase "communion of saints" refers to all true believers in heaven and on earth (holy ones) who share an intimate connection due to our relationship with Jesus Christ**. **It is what all Christians partake in because we fellowship together in Christ**. So, here's how I distinguish between the two lines ... the holy Christian church and the communion of saints. **The first** refers to Christ as the universal foundation for the church throughout the ages and is composed of everyone who truly trusts in Him as Savior and Lord. **The second** is the fellowship that Christians for all time share together and that compels us to draw closer to one another in holiness as we look to Jesus (**... let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**), the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

When we take communion on the first Sunday of every month, we are saying to one another that we are the redeemed in Christ and that as brothers and sisters of all true Christians throughout the ages we share a common goal. That is ... **to live holy and faithfully to our Lord and Savior**. That's why I always invite everyone who is a true follower of Christ to partake with us. **The kind of communion described in Scripture is not based on race, education, income, skin color, family background or anything else except THE SHARED DESIRE TO WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS.** It's no small thing to join in the communion/fellowship of saints!

The source of communion (**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, -- Philippians 2:1**). Not every Christian is easy to get along with. Some are a real challenge. **Let's be honest with ourselves ... we are different from one another given our family of origin, where we've grown up, our church backgrounds or lack thereof, and even where we're at in our maturity in Christ**. That's

why it is so easy for us not to see eye to eye. Add to that we are in a spiritual conflict with Satan and his minions (demons) and it is a recipe for ***anything but communion***. The unity of the body is a gift from God and something we are to work diligently to preserve (**Ephesians 4:3 – (let us be) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**). **When Paul begins this passage with four *"IF" statements*, it's not his way of expressing doubt about them like some of us might have expressed about the Bears before the draft this past week. NOW IT'S SUPER BOWL OR BUST**! But I digress. ***Paul knows*** there is ENCOURAGEMENT through their union in Christ. ***He knows*** there is COMFORT from God's love. ***He knows*** there is PARTICIPATION (communion) in the Spirit. And ***he knows*** there is AFFECTION AND SYMPATHY (*an outpouring of mercy*) for one another.

In fact, he's actually expressing a high degree of certainty that each statement is true. Now, how can he be so sure? ***Because Paul understands where they come from***. **Our communion with Christ is the basis of our communion with one another**. **Everything we do for one another flows naturally from God's kindness to us**. As one preacher (Ray Pritchard) says, "***It's not as if God says, 'Do this and I will bless you,' but rather, '(Because) I have blessed you, now do this***.'" His point is that we already possess everything we need to be able to live in communion with one another because the Lord has given it to us. Now Paul moves to explain HOW this kind of fellowship is produced in us.

Three essentials of communion (**...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and one mind -- Philippians 2:2**). Paul points to THREE INGREDIENTS that are necessary for the communion of saints. When each is present the result is that his cup of joy is filled up. That's how important it is to him.

- **The Shared Mind (the same mind).** When it comes to our fellowship with the rest of the body of Christ, **we must learn to think the same when it comes to the direction of our lives**. ***This common purpose is the result of a shared statement of faith ... what we believe***. I've said it quite often, but I'll remind you again that what **we believe determines how we behave**. While there have always been differences in what Christians believe, there are some things that we must believe or we are not Christian! ***These are the essentials of the faith*** and involve things like **the fact that there is one God existing eternally in three persons**, **that the Bible is without error and authoritative in every matter to which it speaks**, **that Christ is God the Son**, **that He became a man, lived a sinless life and atoned for man's sin through His death on the cross**, **that He was raised in a bodily resurrection**, **that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone** and **that His personal return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is imminent**. We may differ on some of the small points regarding some of these, but ***our agreement with them in principle is the kind of shared thinking that produces the communion of saints***.
- **The Shared Heart (the same love).** This is the love that comes from God and touches us in a personal way. It enables us to love one another the way the Lord loves us. **It is self-sacrificing and always has the good of others as its aim.** So many of you model this for our

family. **On behalf of all of us,** I want to express sincere thanks to each of you. You are great examples to follow.

- **The Shared Soul (being of full accord and one mind). Peterson's translation** of this verse says**, "Be deep-spirited friends."** In the Greek, it's expressed as **"one souled." This is a heartfelt unity of mind and purpose that demonstrates love and respect for each other.** I think that's a little bit of what Paul means when he says Christians who commune together have a shared soul. *We understand that when one wins, we all win*!! **As you know, I'm a sports fan. Many years ago, I was watching an NBA playoff game between the Boston Celtics and the L. A. Lakers. Before the game started, they introduced the starting lineup for the visiting Lakers (Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Magic Johnson, James Worthy, Byron Scott and Michael Cooper). This was followed by the names of the first four Celtics (Kevin McHale, Robert Parrish, Danny Ainge and Dennis Johnson). That's when the announcer said, "*There are four good basketball players*." After that, they announced Larry Bird and the same announcer said, "*There are five great basketball players*." What was he saying? Larry Bird elevated the game of every one of his teammates. I was not a Celtic fan. I rooted for the Lakers (showtime), but what I did respect so much about Larry Bird was that he didn't care who got the glory as long as they won the game.** That's kind of what Paul is describing here about being of full accord and one mind. When Christians share the same soul, we're not in it for ourselves, but for the glory of God and the benefit of everyone else.

Two results of communion (**Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count one another more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others -- Philippians 2:3-4**). This is the application for our message this morning.

- **A New Attitude Toward Others.** This means no more selfish ambition! No more rivalries! We recognize that the goal isn't to exalt ourselves, but the Lord (**Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool -- Psalm 99:5**). We stop thinking that all of this is about us. We no longer insist on our way. We focus no more on what divides the body but what unites us. **We do not deny the truth, but we stop using the Bible to justify our hate for others. Instead, we love them because God loves them.**
- **A New Attitude Toward Yourself.** It begins with humility. I said last week that humility means **lowliness of mind. It is to have a realistic understanding of who we are in light of who God is. There is only One who is great and that is not you or me. Only God is great! The humble person deliberately lowers himself to the role of a servant and puts the interests of others before himself. How do we develop humility? First, admit to God that you have it within you to be a proud person (Lucifer was also proud -- Isaiah 14:12-14). Then, think less about your abilities and more about your inadequacies. Ask how God wants you to grow and mature. This brings us to our application for today.**

From time to time, we all need an attitude adjustment. When we start being unkind to others or think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Have you allowed your pride to create division between you and someone else in the body of Christ? Take a moment and make a mental note of an OLD ATTITUDE that needs to be confessed and repented of and a NEW ATTITUDE that should replace it. Then ask someone else to help you get there through accountability.

Conclusion: The last thing **LaShanda Calloway** saw before she died was people literally stepping over her to continue shopping as if nothing had happened. Calloway had stopped to shop in a convenience store in Wichita, Kansas, when she was stabbed in an altercation. As she lay dying, a surveillance camera recorded no less than five people stepping over her to continue down the store's aisles. Only one stopped briefly—to take a picture of Calloway with a cell phone camera. "***It was tragic to watch***," police spokesman **Gordon Bassham** said. "***The fact that people were more interested in taking a picture with a cell phone and shopping for snacks than helping this innocent young woman is, frankly, revolting***." Wichita police chief **Norman Williams** had even stronger words: "***That's crazy! What happened to our respect for life***?" You may disagree, but my answer to his question is this: **the further away we move from God's will for us, the uglier it gets for everyone involved as we become increasingly uncaring and unloving**. Sadly, we know that people can treat each other this way, but when we are in fellowship with others who fellowship with Christ, we act very differently. Says **Frederica Mathewes-Green** in her book ***First Fruits of Prayer***, "***The main evidence that we are growing in Christ is not exhilarating prayer experiences, but steadily increasing, humble love for other people***."

NOW JOIN ME AND LET'S DECLARE WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS BY RECITING TOGETHER THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, **the communion of saints**, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.